

# A Child's Language Acquisition: The Metathesis Phenomena

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## Abstract

Metathesis is one of the unique phenomena among the children during their language acquisition phase. This research aims at investigating the metathesis phenomena happens in a child. The research method used in this research is qualitative method, especially case study. The results of this research show that the metathesis phenomena happen in that child is related to 16 phonemes. It includes pure metathesis in the same syllable phonemes, pure metathesis in the different syllables phonemes, metathesis followed by phonemes addition, metathesis followed by phonemes omission, and metathesis followed by both of them. The findings from this research will be the basis in conducting the following relevant studies.

**Keywords:** child, language acquisition, metathesis

## Introduction

Children's language acquisition is an interesting topic to study since every child has different capacity in acquiring the language. Some children are fast in acquiring the language. However, the others acquire the language slowly. There are several factors affecting the language acquisition, one of them is individual cognitive (Maftoon and Sarem, 2012). Children are unique creature who has different cognitive level from one to another, that's why cognitive factor may affect the language acquisition. The other factor affecting the language acquisition is the socio-cultural factor (Aimin, 2013). In this case, the environment plays key role in the language acquisition. All of the factors affecting the language acquisition makes it becomes interesting topic since the proses will be dynamic for every child.

Moreover, related to the acquisition stages, children have to face certain stages. It begins from cooing to babbling, holophrastic, the two-words, telegraphic, and later multiword stages (Hutauruk, 2015). In accordance with the previous explanation, the children in the same years can face different stages. Furthermore, related to the children's language development, language acquisition in children begins from phonological acquisition which step by step develops to syllable and word acquisition. Usually, word acquisition, which is called as morphological process, is followed by meaning acquisition or semantic process. Finally, the children will learn to construct the complete sentences through some steps which are called as syntaxes processes. Especially for second language acquisition, it's quite different from the first language acquisition (Maftoon and Sarem, 2012). It is also stated that in the second language acquisition, the children acquire the language in different speed and mastery level. Usually, it's about the age, aptitude, intelligence, cognitive, attitude, personality and motivation. Again, the



all of the stages in language acquisition cannot be generalized since there are a lot of factors influencing the process.

Based on the preliminary studies, the problems that will in dominant appear in children less than three years old are the problems related to the phonology and word acquisition, not sentence acquisition. The problems will be different for each child. For example, in this phase, usually the children have acquired the whole phonological units. However, some children do not acquire some units yet. The similar phenomena also happen in relation to the word acquisition. Some children may acquire a lot of words in their age. However, the others just acquire a few words. It is because of many factors.

Moreover, based on the preliminary study, still, phonological acquisition in children is difficult to analyze if it stands alone. It is an important thing to analyze phonological acquisition through the words as the media. The topics that can be studied through the relationship of those parts of language can be various. One of them is metathesis phenomena. It is an interesting topic since it captures the effort of the children in producing the language but they are failed because they change the position of some phonemes in the words.

Thus, the researcher is interested to conduct a research on children's language acquisition, especially on metathesis phenomena. This research is aimed at giving information to the society, especially to the parents and educators dealing with the children less than three years old, so that they can have more references about children's language acquisition as the basis on guiding the children to acquire the language. This study becomes important since different from the other study, this study focuses on the metathesis phenomena of a child from a small village in Wonosobo. It can be a baby step for the next relevant studies, especially about linguistic phenomena in Wonosobo. Moreover, it can also be the evidence that every child grows in their own rate, including in acquiring the languages, which shows the gap between the theory of language acquisition that mentions the fixed stages in acquiring the languages and the reality.

### **Children's Language Acquisition**

Investigating the children's language acquisition is an effort to provide the information as the guidance to help them acquiring the language. To provide brief information, some relevant theories are needed. This part of the report reviews some theories relevant to the study which is mainly at investigating the children's language acquisition, especially related to the metathesis phenomena. In this part, there are some theories about the children's language acquisition, the problems and the metathesis phenomena.

Every child has his/her own stages in acquiring languages. In line with, Pinter (2006: 6) says that although children in the same age have similar characteristics, actually every child is unique. The unique of the children also happens in their language acquisition process. Some children acquire the languages soon, but the others acquire the languages slowly. In our daily life, sometimes we find a child who can speak when he/she is still a year. However, the other children can speak when they are two years old. It shows the unique process in language acquisition.

Moreover, in acquiring languages, that the children have to face some stages of development which are first word, single words, and double words (Clark and



Clark, 1977). For example, in Indonesia, the first word which is usually acquired by the children is 'mama' or 'papa'. The children will acquire more words time by time. Next, the stages of the children's language acquisition development in more detail way which includes sound producing, babbling, speaking, naming (one word), holophrastic functioning (one word), telegraphic uttering (2-3 words), and morphemic acquiring (Steinberg, Nagata, and Aline, 2001). For example, firstly, the children will only produce the sound 'uh' or 'eh' or 'ma'. Then, they will repeat the sounds just like 'mamamam'. Then, they will begin to produce words. Thus, acquiring language is a long process from one level to another.

Moreover, the kinds of words acquired by the children are "here" and "now" words (Dardjowidjojo, 2008). It means that the words acquired by the children are highly influenced by the environment around the children. The children who stay in a dynamic environment, theoretically, will acquire more various words than the children who live in a static and monotonous environment and so on. For example, the children from the village near the beach will acquire more words related to the sea, like 'ship', 'fish', 'beach', and so on. However, the children who live near the mountain will acquire more words related to the mountain, like 'top', 'slope', 'tree', 'hiking', and so on. Thus, the environment is one of the most affecting factors of language acquisition.

### Metathesis Phenomena

In acquiring languages, the children can make unintentionally mistakes, such as failed to produce some phonemes and some words in right order of phonemes. Sometimes, they also add some phonemes that are not needed in some words or omit some phonemes needed to construct some words. The mistakes belong to assembling mistakes. Assembling mistakes is defined as the mistakes happen when the words chosen are correct but the order is incorrect (Dardjowidjojo, 2008). The mistakes are also called as transposition. There are three types of transposition which are spoonerism, anticipation, and perseveration/repetition.

One of the specific types of 'mistakes' in producing the language is the change of the phonemes' positions that is called metathesis. In the other term, it is called as syllabic mistake (Dardjowidjojo, 2008). Moreover, metathesis can be in the form of the change of phonemes or syllables' positions in a word. Metathesis phenomena often happen in children's language acquisition process. The children sometimes unintentionally utter the words in incorrect order of phonemes or syllables. For example, they want to say /jilbab/ but in fact they say /jiblab/, where phoneme /l/ is changed into phoneme /b/.

Moreover, language producing mistakes can be in the form of adding, omitting, changing, and wrong ordering (Brown, 2007). The mistakes can happen because of the intra-language or inter-language factors. It means that the mistakes can happen when the children are failed in acquiring the first language or transferring the first into the second languages and so on.

### Relevant Studies

There are some research studies relevant with the idea of investigating the children's language acquisition, especially related to the metathesis phenomena. The first is a research entitled *Pemerolehan Bahasa Indonesia Anak Usia 2,5*



*Tahun: Studi Kasus terhadap Pemerolehan Bahasa Anak Usia Dini* (Rusyani, 2012). There are three main results in her research. Firstly, children in 2,5 years old can produce phonemes and simple words. However, the language production is not perfect yet since there are some mistakes. Secondly, 2,5 year old children begin to produce abstract nouns. Thirdly, they begin to be able to arrange the words into simple sentences. The second is a research entitled *Pemerolehan Bahasa Pertama Pada Anak Usia 0-7 tahun Melalui Tahap-Tahapnya* (Rambyong, 2012). The result of the research is the children in 0-7 years old have to face three stages of language acquisition device. Firstly, they are in pralinguistic stage (pralinguistic 1 and 2). Then, they have to face linguistic stage (linguistic 1, 2, 3, and 4). The last, they will face complete competence stage. The last is a research entitled *Studi Kasus Pemerolehan Bunyi Fonologis Bahasa Indonesia pada Anak Usia 4 Tahun* (Rahmat, 2008). There are two main results of the study. Firstly, the child commits typical phonological mistakes. Secondly, language acquisition is highly influenced by neurological ability, not the ages.

This research is special compared to the relevant studies mentioned earlier since different from the object of the relevant studies which is something general, the object of this research is such a specific subject which is the specific phenomena in children's language acquisition, especially related to the metathesis phenomena. It becomes the 'puzzle piece' to complete the research puzzle on children's language acquisition.

## Method

As the goal of the study is to investigate the children's language acquisition, especially related to the metathesis phenomena in a 2,5 year old child, this study is classified into Case Study. The finding of this research will be the brief information related to the children's language acquisition, especially related to the metathesis phenomena in a 2,5 year old child.

Related to the data collection, this study was conducted for 6 months. Then, the research procedures used in this research were adapted from a case study model proposed by Kadir (Kadir in Syamsudin and Damianti, 2009) which involves the selection of the case, data collection, data analysis, refinement, and report. Next, the subjects of this study were a child, his parents, and the neighbors while the components to capture in this study were pure metathesis, metathesis followed by addition, and metathesis followed by omission. Then, since this study belongs to qualitative studies, this study used the researcher herself as the key instrument of the study and the researcher also used some supporting instruments such as an observation guidelines, interview guidelines, documentation guidelines and check lists. Moreover, validity in this study was gained through increasing diligence, triangulation, member check, and documentation. Next, the data in this study was analyzed based on Miles and Huberman's interactive cycle model (Miles and Huberman, 1984: 23) which involves data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion.

## Findings

Actually, there are a lot of data gained from this study. However, the researcher needs to focus on the object of the research. Thus, the researcher



selects only the appropriate data to analyze. The data is related to the children's language acquisition, especially related to the metathesis phenomena. Here are some metathesis phenomenon happens in the main subject of the research.

Table 1. Research Findings

No	Word	No	Word	No	Word	No	Word
1	/plu-sa/	8	/pa – la – ron/	15	/i <sup>h</sup> -rat/	22	/u – ran/
2	/ter- ni- mal/	9	/jar – ka – ta/	16	/sɔ̃ - pa – tik/	23	/re - na?/
3	/tre – mos/	10	/bru-jo/	17	/lɛ - kɛ?/	24	/a - rɔ̃m - bu?/
4	/ser – pe – ti/	11	/ta – nan/	18	/mar – gib/	25	/kru-si/
5	/ji – blab/	12	/gol – bog/	19	/gur – dus/	26	/gul-gu/
6	/nu – lur/	13	/bir-sik/	20	/pan - ta?/		
7	/kon – tlor/	14	/gor-li-la/	21	/ri – tik/		

Those are the lists of the words which will be discussed in this paper. For further explanation, we will have it in the next part.

## Discussion

Metathesis phenomena or the change of the phonemes or syllables in constructing a word usually happens in the children's language acquisition process. The main subject of this research also made some mistakes related to the metathesis phenomena. For almost a month of study, the researcher found 26 words containing metathesis. It consists of 9 words with pure metathesis in the same syllable, 10 words with pure metathesis in the different syllable, 2 words with metathesis followed by addition, 3 words with metathesis followed by omission, and 2 words with metathesis followed by addition and omission. To make it clear, the data were grouped and analyzed as follows.

### 1. Pure metathesis in the same syllable

There are 10 words with pure metathesis in the same syllable. They are displayed and analyzed in the following table.

Table 2. Pure Metathesis in the Same Syllable

No.	Metathesis	Correct Utterance	Description
1	/plu-sa/	/pul-sa/	/u/ was changed into /l/ and vice versa.
2	/nu – lur/	/nu- rul/	/r/ was changed into /l/ and vice versa.
3	/kon – tlor/	/kon – trol/	/r/ was changed into /l/ and vice versa.
4	/tre – mos/	/ter - mos/	/e/ was changed into /r/ and vice versa.



5	/bru-jo/	/bur-jo/	/u/ was changed into /r/ and vice versa.
6	/ta – nan/	/ta – nan/	/ŋ/ was changed into /n/ and vice versa.
7	/bir-sik/	/bri-sik/	/r/ was changed into /i/ and vice versa.
8	/kru-si/	/kur-si/	/u/ was changed into /r/ and vice versa.
9	/gul-gu/	/glu-gu/ (Javanese)	/l/ was changed into /u/ and vice versa.

Based on the data, in the first word, the sound /u/ was changed into /l/ and vice versa. For the second word, the sound /r/ was changed into /l/ and vice versa. Next, in the third word, the sound /r/ was changed into /l/ and vice versa. Then, in next word, the sound /e/ was changed into /r/ and vice versa. Moreover, in the next word, the sound /u/ was changed into /r/ and vice versa. In the sixth word, the sound /ŋ/ was changed into /n/ and vice versa. In the seventh word, the sound /r/ was changed into /i/ and vice versa. Then, the sound /u/ was also changed into /r/ and vice versa in the next word. The last, the sound /l/ was changed into /u/ and vice versa in the last word.

## 2. Pure metathesis in the different syllables

There are also 10 words with pure metathesis in the different syllables. They are displayed and analyzed in the following table.

Table 3. Pure Metathesis in the Different Syllables

No.	Metathesis	Correct utterance	Description
1	/ter-ni-mal/	/ter-mi-nal/	/m/ in the beginning of the second syllable was changed into /n/ in the beginning of the third syllable and vice versa.
2	/pa – la – ron/	/pa-ra-lon/	/r/ in the beginning of the second syllable was changed into /l/ in the beginning of the third syllable and vice versa.
3	/ser – pe – ti/	/se – per – ti/	/r/ in the second syllable was moved into the end of the first syllable.
4	/jar – ka – ta/	/ja – kar – ta/	/r/ in the second syllable was moved into the end of the first syllable.
5	/gol – bog/	/go – blog/	/l/ in the middle of the second syllable was moved into the end of the first





			syllable.
6	/mar – gib/	/mag – rib/	/r/ in the beginning of the second syllable was changed into /g/ in the end of the first syllable and vice versa.
7	/gur – dus/	/gus – dur/	/s/ in the end of the first syllable was changed into /r/ in the end of the second syllable and vice versa.
8	/ji – blab/	/jil – bab/	/l/ in the end of the first syllable was changed into /b/ in the beginning of the second syllable and vice versa.
9	/iʃ-rat/	/ir - ʃat/	/r/ in the end of the first syllable was changed into /ʃ/ in the beginning of the second syllable and vice versa.
10	/kɛ - lɛʔ/	/lɛ - kɛʔ/ (Javanese)	/l/ in the beginning of the first syllable was changed into /k/ in the beginning of the second syllable and vice versa.

Based on the data, in the first word, the sound /m/ in the beginning of the second syllable was changed into /n/ in the beginning of the third syllable and vice versa. In the next word, the sound /r/ in the beginning of the second syllable was changed into /l/ in the beginning of the third syllable and vice versa. Next, the sound /r/ in the second syllable was moved into the end of the first syllable in the next word. Then, in the next word, the sound /r/ in the second syllable was moved into the end of the first syllable. In the next word, the sound /l/ in the middle of the second syllable was moved into the end of the first syllable. Next, the sound /r/ in the beginning of the second syllable was changed into /g/ in the end of the first syllable and vice versa in the next word. The sound /s/ in the end of the first syllable was also changed into /r/ in the end of the second syllable and vice versa in the next word. Then, the sound /l/ in the end of the first syllable was changed into /b/ in the beginning of the second syllable and vice versa in the next word. Next, the sound /r/ in the end of the first syllable was changed into /ʃ/ in the beginning of the second syllable and vice versa in the next word. Finally, in the last word, the sound /l/ in the beginning of the first syllable was changed into /k/ in the beginning of the second syllable and vice versa.

### 3. Metathesis followed by addition



There are only 2 words with metathesis followed by addition. They are displayed and analyzed in the following table.

Table 4. Metathesis Followed by Addition

No.	Metathesis	Correct Utterance	Description
1	/a - rôm - bu?/	/am-bru?/ (Javanese)	/m/ in the end of the first syllable was moved to the end of the second syllable. /b/ in the beginning of the second syllable was moved into the beginning of the third syllable. /r/ in the middle of the second syllable was moved into the beginning of the second syllable. /u/ and /?/ in the end of the second syllable were moved into the end of the third syllable. Then, /ð/ was appeared in the middle of the second syllable.
2	/gor-li-la/	/go-ri-la/	/r/ was appeared in the end of the first syllable.

Based on the data, in the first word, the sound /m/ in the end of the first syllable was moved to the end of the second syllable. Then, still in the same word, the sound /b/ in the beginning of the second syllable was moved into the beginning of the third syllable. Next, the sound /r/ in the middle of the second syllable was moved into the beginning of the second syllable. Next, the sound /u/ and /?/ in the end of the second syllable were moved into the end of the third syllable. Then, /ð/ was appeared in the middle of the second syllable. Finally, in the next word, /r/ was appeared in the end of the first syllable.

#### 4. Metathesis followed by omission

There are only 3 words with metathesis followed by omission. They are displayed and analyzed in the following table.

Table 5. Metathesis Followed by Omission

No.	Metathesis	Correct Utterance	Description
1	/ri - tik/	/lis - trik/	/r/ in the second syllable was moved into the first syllable to change /l/ in the beginning of the first syllable. /l/ and /s/ in the first syllable were omitted
2	/re - na?/	/ter - na?/	/t/ in the beginning of the first syllable was omitted. /e/ was moved





			into /r/ and vice versa.
3	/u – ran/	/ru – wan/	/u/ was moved into /r/ and vice versa. Additional phoneme /w/ was omitted.

Based on the data on the table, in the first word, the sound /r/ in the second syllable was moved into the first syllable to change /l/ in the beginning of the first syllable. Then, the sound /l/ and /s/ in the first syllable were omitted. In the next word, the sound /t/ in the beginning of the first syllable was omitted. /e/ was moved into /r/ and vice versa. In the last word, the sound /u/ was moved into /r/ and vice versa. Then, the additional phoneme /w/ was omitted.

##### 5. Metathesis followed by addition and omission

There are only 2 words with metathesis followed by addition and omission. They are displayed and analyzed in the following table.

Table 6. Metathesis Followed by Addition and Omission

No.	Metathesis	Correct Utterance	Description
1	/pan - ta?/	/tam - pa?/	/t/ in the beginning of the first syllable was moved into /p/ in the beginning of the second syllable. /m/ in the end of the first syllable was omitted. /n/ was appeared to change /m/.
2	/sɔ - pa - tik/	/plas - tik/	/s/ in the end of the first syllable was moved into the beginning of the first syllable, changed the position of /p/. /p/ was moved into the beginning of the second syllable. However, /ɔ/ which is not needed was appeared. /l/ in the middle of the first syllable was omitted

From the data above, in the first word, the sound/t/ in the beginning of the first syllable was moved into /p/ in the beginning of the second syllable. Then, the sound /m/ in the end of the first syllable was omitted. Next, the sound /n/ was appeared to change /m/. In the second word, the sound /s/ in the end of the first syllable was moved into the beginning of the first syllable, changed the position of /p/. Next, the sound /p/ was moved into the beginning of the second syllable. However, /ɔ/ which is not needed was appeared. The last, /l/ in the middle of the first syllable was omitted

In accordance with the data above it can be shown that the metathesis is related to 16 phonemes. They are /u/ /l/, /e/, /r/, /ɔ/, /ŋ/, /n/, /i/, /m/, g/, /s/, /b/, /ʃ/, /k/, /ʔ/,



/w/. In detail, the phonemes are divided into five groups. First, metathesis in the same syllable phonemes are /u/, /l/, /e/, /r/, /ŋ/, /n/, /i/. Second, pure metathesis in the different syllables phonemes are /m/, /n/, /r/, /l/, /g/, /s/, /b/, /ʃ/, /k/, /u/, /?/. Third, metathesis followed by addition phonemes involves /ð/ and /r/. Fourth, metathesis followed by omission phonemes involves /l/, /s/, /w/. The last, Metathesis followed by addition and omission phonemes are /m/, /l/ (omitted), and /n/, and /ð/ (added).

Moreover, in the other perspective, it can be also divided into three groups. First, pure metathesis phonemes are /u/, /l/, /e/, /r/, /ŋ/, /n/, /i/, /m/, /n/, /g/, /s/, /b/, /ʃ/, /k/, /?/. Second, metathesis followed by addition phonemes are /ð/, /n/, and /r/. The last, metathesis followed by omission phonemes are /l/, /s/, /w/, /m/.

Based on the discussion, the findings of this study show that every child grows in their own rate. It is quite different from the theories which propose that there are fixed stages in language acquisition. The evidence will be stronger when it is supported by the other relevant studies.

## Conclusion

To sum up, the 26 metathesis produced by the main subject of this research can be divided into five categories. Firstly, there are 9 words with pure metathesis in the same syllable produced by the main subject of this research. The metathesis is related to /u/, /l/, /e/, /r/, /ŋ/, /n/, /i/. Secondly, there are 10 words with pure metathesis in the different syllables produced by the main subject of this research. The metathesis is related to /m/, /n/, /r/, /l/, /g/, /s/, /b/, /ʃ/, /k/, /u/, /?/. Then, there are 2 words with metathesis followed by addition produced by the main subject of this research. The metathesis is related to /ð/ and /r/. Next, there are 3 words with metathesis followed by omission produced by the main subject of this research. The metathesis is related to /l/, /s/, /w/. The last, there are 2 words with metathesis followed by addition and omission produced by the main subject of this research. The metathesis is related to /m/, /l/ (omitted), and /n/, and /ð/ (added). The findings are significant to lead the care takers to give the appropriate support for the child's language acquisition. It is also precious as the preliminary study for the next relevant studies since it provides the basic data on metathesis phenomena.



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